

MTV Punk by Gazyrlezon

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Gen

Language: English

Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Troy (Stranger Things), Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Will Byers & Eleven | Jane Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-08-22

Updated: 2018-08-22

Packaged: 2022-04-23 02:28:41

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,647

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

“You ran home crying that day, and after that you never saw that freak again. Maybe you even convinced yourself that she wasn’t real, that it was Mike who broke your arm and you just misremembered it. But you didn’t. And in that week, this one freak scared you more than anything else —”

Here she turned round, and was satisfied to find him suitably terrified at her knowing all this.

“And that freak was me.”

MTV Punk

Like all things in life outside of the lab, school was *weird*. El had been introduced to it four years after she'd escaped from her previous life, following years of being home-schooled and trying desperately to catch up before feeling confident enough to attend Hawkins High. Hell, she hadn't even been able to *read* in any acceptable speed until Hopper'd started reading her children's books in their lonely year together.

She'd used to idolize it a bit, to be honest. Sure, she knew that school wasn't all good; on her second day with Mike, walking along those old train tracks, she'd first heard of someone called Troy who apparently liked to hurt her friends, and shortly afterwards she'd met the boy herself. So she knew school didn't come without its problems.

Even so, she'd longed for it. School meant normalcy. It meant being closer to who she might've been if she were Jane Ives, and not El. Even now, that was her name to herself and her friends: *El*. Jane was a fine name, she supposed, and one she didn't dislike having, but it wasn't *her*, not the girl who'd escaped from the lab and found friends in a few nerdy losers during a rainstorm (Monday, November 7 of 1983, that'd been. She'd never forget that day, and she'd never forget its date, either). *Jane*, that who she could've been but wasn't, and the girl she played to people who didn't—couldn't—know who she really was. She'd finally had her tattoo removed last summer, so she'd be able to attend school without always hiding it beneath long sleeves, but even without it she was still the same person, caught in a weird limbo between wanting to be Jane and remaining herself. She'd never be really Jane, but she wasn't Eleven, either. And so she'd just stuck with the name Mike had given her.

The first few weeks at school weren't too bad. She was the new girl, usually quiet, and no one but her friends ever spoke to her. Sometimes she had trouble figuring out where the next classroom was, and on a very few cases she had absolutely no idea what the lessons were about, but not as often as she'd feared. Even the teachers usually let her be, and she let them be; even when she thought she knew the answer to some question they'd asked she

usually remained silent; the fear and uncertainty of being laughably wrong still too strong for her to stomach it.

She'd seen Troy and his friend James for the first time after a week or so. But they (as well as her friends) were a year above her, and she was careful never to get too close to those two. Jim Hopper's old formula still held: Avoid trouble wherever possible. There was little about her that looked like the blond-haired, dirty girl in the pink dress that they knew her as, but she saw no need to take any risks.

And while gradually she became aware of the bickering between the various groups among her fellow students, the insults thrown and exchanged and the occasional small-scale war between students and a disliked teacher she quickly resolved she'd not be any part of that. El made a few acquaintances and passing friendships, but she was careful not to get too close to anyone lest they notice that something was, well ... *off* about her. That wasn't very hard; by law, she was Jim Hopper's daughter. The Chief was known as a sometimes impulsive, no-bullshit man who was unrelenting (well, he was if he got his coffee, but no one save his colleagues and family knew that), and if this new girl could set him off ... well, enough to say that this prospect alone inspired a certain amount of respect even among rebellious teenagers (although, after watching the troublemakers for a while, El eventually had to concede that Jonathan was right, and that very many of them rebelled within very strict rules, all in the same way and all more or less predictably).

Besides, El still had the leather jacket that Kali'd given her. In the absence of something like an address or a phone number, that jacket was the only thing that still connected her with her sister, and so El wore it almost every day.

And when she came to school like this, hair gelled firmly back (long hair annoyed her, but she didn't want to have it shorter, since that meant memories) and all in black, looking, in Jim Hopper's words, like an "MTV Punk"; not even looking as if she wanted to provoke someone but as if her clothes were the most normal thing in the world (which, to her, they were) that probably made some think twice before they made fun of her, too. Or at least they didn't let her know that they made fun of her, and she didn't notice it, either. El was too busy learning exciting new things to pay much attention to

what anyone was whispering behind her back.

And for the few cases in which people *did* want to bother her, she'd decided on her reaction beforehand: She ignored those. Utterly. She'd survived the lab, too, and had resolved to refuse being bothered by someone merely calling her names.

So overall, school was pretty okay.

Except one thing wasn't. Because maybe her status as the Chief's daughter and the leather jacket kept bullies away from *her*, at least for now while she was new and no one'd figured out how far they could push this girl yet, but that didn't mean they wouldn't bother her friends.

Her friends had hid that, she realized after some time. She'd thought it had gotten better, and maybe it had for a while; maybe Troy really *had* stopped to bully them after she'd rescued Mike from him and broken his arm, but if so, he'd started again while she hadn't been there. And her friends had hid that from her.

She could understand that, on some level. They probably didn't want to bother her. She'd used to hide a lot from them, too, and sometimes still did. Not every nightmare she had needed to be discussed by her friends, after all. But still ...

It was the worst with Will. Maybe it was because they lived under one roof, had even shared a room for half a year while Hopper and Joyce had already moved in but not yet found a larger house, but the knowledge that those slight cases of low spirits that happened now and then almost always coincided with Troy or someone else hurling verbal abuse at him *hurt*.

Two months in, and she was close to boiling over.

And then, one day in early November (it was always November, for some reason), right when she'd carelessly been snacking on half a chocolate bar during recess (a gift from Joyce, both for the—considering her history—good grade she'd brought home on her first test and a joking acknowledgement that she was less trouble in the mornings, sitting at the breakfast table while Will still clung to his

bed), having just given the other half to Mike (Lucas had made appropriate gagging noises upon observing what he called their “sickening sweetness” towards each other) and was walking back towards her classroom he found Will dejectedly lying on a bench, trying his best not to cry. A hardly containable fury bubbled up in her, quickly overwhelming any self-set bounds she might’ve set in place.

She sat down next to her almost-brother, took his hand in hers.

El came into English twenty minutes late, with a half-meant apology thrown at her teacher.

Also, she was searching for Troy.

She finally found him after fifth period, hurrying past her in a busy hallway. He was alone, too. Students were hurrying to their next lessons, but he didn’t seem to be accompanied by anyone. *Great.*

“Hey Troy!”

For half a moment he thought he’d ignore her. But after a short hesitation he *did* turn around, searching the crowd of students for who’d called out. El knew that he wasn’t particularly popular. And he probably didn’t remember her voice.

And, most importantly, she was quite certain that he had no idea who she was. Just Jane, that new girl in the black leather jacket, sort of quiet, started school a couple months ago after being home-schooled all her life. Tended to hang out with the losers, too, but too opaque to bully her quite yet. Or maybe he just wasn’t interested in her; whatever the criteria for being bullied were, they didn’t appear to make any sense.

She walked up to him, heedless of his bafflement.

“We need to talk.”

Maybe it was her tone of voice—Jim’d once told her she sounded pretty convincing if she wanted to—or just his surprise, but he followed her without argument. She led him away from the crowd of hurrying students, down into the side corridor that led past the staff room and then finally to Hawkins High School’s library. She got lucky; the hallway was as abandoned as it’d ever been.

She wondered what Troy thought she meant to do with him. He didn’t seem frightened. Maybe he hoped that she, leading him into an abandoned place like this, meant to ... uh, no, not even he could be that stupid.

Without even glancing at the door to the library, El had locked it. For the moment she didn’t want any interruption. Effortlessly, she took hold of the air behind them, too, blocking them off towards the staff room. In the end sound was nothing more than moving air, and after she’d had some years to practice her powers air was nothing she couldn’t control or hold still.

No one’d hear anything of what she was about to say.

All that she did in a second, almost without thinking. Then she turned to Troy.

He seemed anxious what this strange girl wanted from him. In a couple of minutes he’d have physics, something she knew because Mike was in one class with him, and although he didn’t seem to be the type maybe he worried about being late, too. Mr. Martin wasn’t nearly as forgiving as Mr. Clarke had been back in Middle School.

“I met Will after recess,” she began. He still looked more puzzled than frightened. Idiot. “He was close to crying. I wonder how that could be?”

Now, finally, he seemed to understand what was going on. Still, he didn’t try to flee. Maybe he thought that would be like admitting he’d done something wrong.

“Uh, come on—” he began, but she quickly cut him off.

"It took me a while, before he told me what'd happened. Said it wasn't anything unusual. Honestly, you ought to thank him; if he'd told me sooner, well ... In any case, he told me now." She reached into her pocket and dragged a short strip of paper out. There was a list on it.

"So let's see. Fag, freak, weirdo, fairy, zombie, zombie-boy, zombie-freak, zombie-monster, *just* monster, ..."

It was almost hard not to start laughing. El wasn't actually reading; the list was nothing more than the shopping list Joyce had given her last weekend when she'd gone to the supermarket. But she made sure that Troy didn't notice, of course, and she thought that this way it was more dramatic. She had, after all, had two entire lessons time to think on what to do with him.

"... disgrace to humanity, *queer* fairy, just queer, fucking queer, fuckface, fucker, piece of shit, *load* of shit ..."

She had the list in her head, compiled from what Will had told her, from what she'd heard around school and could reasonably assume Troy had said at some point, from what she'd overheard him saying herself, from what Mike'd told her ...

It took a while before she crammed the list back into her pocket. "Honestly, I'd be embarrassed. Half of these are just combinations of the others. Maybe you ought to pay more attention in art class, you clearly lack imagination."

She'd lifted that line only slightly changed from a TV show that she hoped Troy hadn't seen. El wasn't usually very good at being intimidating. Vaguely, she hoped that this whole MTV Punkt thing might help.

Finally, though, Troy decided that he couldn't just let this new girl come and insult him. He'd made a show of being bored while she'd "read" the list, and now he actually had the nerve to *yawn*.

"So what?" he asked, "You defending the little freak? Can't he just come and defend himself, or is he too weak and sensitive for that? Afraid of him getting a stroke?"

El could've laughed. Mike repeatedly told her that she was the strongest person he'd ever met, because she'd survived the lab, but she'd always thought he was wrong. She'd never known anything *but* the lab, so living there hadn't been unusual for her. Not that this would've made it easy, of course, but since she'd never even known anything better was possible at all she'd also never considered what else might be possible. She'd just accepted that as her life. Will, on the other hand, *had* known something else. He'd known the best sides of life *before* the Upside Down, and he'd still not given up, and if that wasn't strength then El didn't know what was. It was much easier to despair, she thought, if one had a reference point about how bad one's life was.

But instead of laughing, she turned around, facing towards the library door and away from Troy, and let him talk for a while. Will hadn't told her everything—understandable, given he was crying half the time, while years of repressed anger'd come pouring out of him—and maybe he'd say something new.

He evidently thought her turning her back meant she was giving in: “Oh just how I thought. I mean look at you, been here for months now and don't even talk to anyone but the other freaks. I mean who are you kidding, you're probably just another queer weirdo like them, aren't you? Frogface's little girlfriend, did he send you here to defend his friend? Or ... oh man. Oh *man*. Well, I didn't think the Chief's daughter would go in for *that* sort of thing. Does your father know that his little girl likes to have it two—”

Uh, God. This was even less interesting that she'd feared it would be. Why did bullies always have to first say a bunch of insults, then hurl insults at their victim's friends, and lastly imply there was some sort of unacceptable relationship between them? It was just so *boring*. El cut him off before she fell asleep.

“Do you remember,” she asked, still not looking at him. “Do you remember what happened on November 12, 1983?”

His voice broke, but he gave no answer. Since she still faced away from him she couldn't see his face, either; in any case, she assumed he didn't know. Almost no one remembered precise dates for anything more than a week back that wasn't their birthday (she only

did because she'd counted up from November 7 of the same year, the day she'd met her friends).

"It was a lovely day. A Saturday, to be exact. Autumn, with discolored leaves on the ground and everything. You spent the day chasing Mike and Dustin."

Still no reaction.

"Oh, remember, remember, that week in November, Will was gone and a new freak had appeared ..."

She still wouldn't turn round, but if he didn't know at this point there was truly no helping him.

"She turned up, hung out with frogface —" it hurt her a little to call Mike that, but otherwise, she felt, it'd have broken the tone — and when you mocked him she made you stop, and when you made him jump off that cliff she dragged him back up and left you with a broken arm."

Actually, in the years since, El had started thinking a lot about morals and philosophy and stuff like that, because when your life was caught between being a lab rat and getting excited about science together with Dustin and your sister had a revenge-gang and was running around killing people, there was really no way around that. And the question of whether or not she'd been *justified* in breaking his arm had been one of these little points she'd thought about especially. It had seemed so right at the time, and yet later she'd often wondered if that wasn't something closer to what Kali was when she'd met her, which El didn't — couldn't — want to ever be. However, she figured that just freshing up some memories couldn't be too bad. She'd just have to not break his arm this time.

"You ran home crying that day, and after that you never saw that freak again. Maybe you even convinced yourself that she wasn't real, that it was Mike who broke your arm and you just misremembered it. But you didn't. And in that week, this one freak scared you more than anything else —"

Here she turned round, and was satisfied to find him suitably terrified

at her knowing all this. Well, now it was time for the dramatic bit.

“And that freak was me.”

El was somewhat proud that she'd managed to deliver the whole speech in a calm, almost reassuring voice. She'd always found it more threatening when the bad guys on TV weren't shouting but quietly talking, and she figured that, right now, she *was* the bad guy, at least from his perspective.

It appeared to work, too. Troy was shuddering violently, which El found oddly comforting.

Suddenly she jerked her head sideways, the way she'd done on that day when she'd broken his arm. There went the memory. Troy flinched so horribly he almost fell to the floor, but she caught him before he had a chance to. And while he discovered that no matter how much he strained his muscles he couldn't move anymore, she slowly walked up to him.

“So the next time you think to yourself what a horrible little freak Will Byers is and how wonderful it'd be to make his life into hell, I recommend you keep that too yourself. I recommend you just keep on walking straight past him and never, *ever* bother him again.”

Here her script ran out, the things she'd prepared to say during the last two periods were done, and suddenly she wasn't sure how to proceed. Was there anything she'd forgotten?

Ah, yes.

“The same goes for Mike, by the way, or Lucas or Max or any of the others. Even for people who aren't my friend or who don't even know me. You're done bothering people, Troy.”

She let him loose. He stumbled and almost fell. Huh. She hadn't even noticed that she'd had him floating an inch or so above the ground. Hopefully no one'd walked by behind the sound-barrier and seen that.

“I try not to get angry,” she told him. “Because I'm not sure what might happen if I do.” That was, for once, unequivocally the truth. El

knew she had enough raw strength to make cars fly and move loaded containers or make houses explode, and it'd been a while since she'd truly lost control, so she might've grown stronger, too. There wasn't any real way of telling what she might be able to do if she tried without actually *doing* stuff, and that scared her a bit.

More than a bit. It scared her a lot, actually. But, well, if it scared *her*, then at least it ought to keep Troy away from them.

Troy glanced down. El followed his view and saw that he'd pissed himself.

Oh. She'd completely forgotten about that. Probably he now thought that'd been her, too, when her entire point had been to *not* do anything that would hurt him. She didn't want *him* to get bullied now because he'd pissed himself, either.

Ah well. So much for morals and philosophy.

"Go," she told him, and lifted the unseen barrier behind him.

He went. Well, he ran, scrambling away from her, almost falling to the floor, but the effect was the same. He was gone. Hopefully he wouldn't come back, neither to her nor to Will. This had probably been a bit over-the-top, she considered, but it'd been worth it if it meant her sort-of-brother wouldn't be harassed anymore.

Lastly, she wiped the blood from her nose.

Her hand came back overflowing with it. Big red droplets fell to the ground.

Oh shit. Oh shit oh shit oh shit. This she had *not* planned for, where did all the blood come from?

Shit shit shit shit shit.

Somewhat desperate quick-thinking resulted in her mentally holding the blood in her nose, so it wouldn't drop down anymore. She hoped it'd just dry in there and then heal.

There were stains on her jacket.

Maybe the blood hadn't been a good idea. Or maybe she should've glanced at an anatomy book sometime.

As her powers had grown stronger over the years, so had her nosebleeds gotten rarer and rarer until now she practically never had one. But Troy only knew her as the girl with the bleeding nose, so she'd made her nose bleed and, in what she'd thought was a great idea at the time, deliberately used her powers to rip a bit of skin open. Apparently it'd been way too much skin.

Oh God, if she ever told Joyce she'd go haywire.

El hurried into the next bathroom.

Math in sixth period found her ten minutes late, with a tissue paper pressed to her nose and apologizing for being late the second time in one day.

Author's Note:

As I said in the tags, I'm not at all sure about this one. It popped into my head yesterday for no discernible reason and I wrote it down. Then I discovered I had a two-thousand word piece on my hands without any context at all, so I added another two thousand to write an introduction in the probably unfounded hope that this made it any better, but I can't start another multi-chapter thing that'll take ages to get anywhere (I'm already working on two of those ...). So anyways here it is in the vague hope that someone might like to read it.

Gazyrlezon.